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The Evolution of the European Union's Failed Approach to Afghanistan

Oz Hassan¹
The University of Warwick

Abstract

This article provides a genealogical account of European actorship in Afghanistan. It argues that European engagement towards facilitating modernisation and development in Afghanistan was initiated with aid and trade, evolving into humanitarianism in the 1990s, and reconstruction and democratisation in the 2000s. The European Union has had a positive impact on Afghanistan, focusing on humanitarianism, but its multilateral and programme level approach to reconstruction and democratisation has failed to meet the EU's stated objectives. By promoting the flawed 'Bonn Model', the EU is proportionally culpable for failed international attempts to reconstruct Afghanistan; even though the United States has been the primary international actor. Drawing a series of broader lessons, such as tensions between Atlantic solidarity and European integration, and the limitations of the European crisis management, the article demonstrates how European policy has been shaped by crises inside Afghanistan and the larger geopolitical crises these have generated. These have contemporary importance as history suggests that as the US withdraws its commitment to Afghanistan, the EU will have a very significant role in attempting to fill a humanitarian vacuum.

Keywords: European Union; Afghanistan; Democratisation; Humanitarianism; Atlantic Solidarity; European Integration; Security; Constructivist Institutionalism

At the end of 2018, a two-day international conference was held in Geneva Switzerland to evaluate international aid efforts in Afghanistan. Co-hosted by the Afghan government and the United Nations (UN), this was Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's attempt to restore a commitment to reform. For the European Union (EU), however, the conference was touted to be crucial for measuring the results of the 2016 pledging conference held in Brussels. With a commitment of €5 billion, EU Member States established a pathway for Europe to emerge as Afghanistan's most significant international aid donor in what is has been termed Afghanistan's *Transformational Decade* (2015-2024). As such, EU institutions have proved eager to steer their instruments towards stability and security, and build further European momentum towards addressing Afghanistan's continuing insecurity. For many Member States operating through EU multilateral mechanisms, Afghanistan has become a significant test case for evaluating European external actorship and the EU's reach beyond its immediate neighbourhood. It tests the efficacy of EU integration and its approach to crisis management. Conspicuously, however, the EU's performance in Afghanistan, both as part of an international coalition and as a federator for programme level action, has largely escaped sustained scrutiny; albeit with a notable few exceptions (Gross 2012; Theros 2010; Ferrié 2008; Burke 2014). Yet, with the EU and Member States set to have contributed over €16 billion in aid between 2001 and 2021, there is a growing need for critical evaluation. Discernibly, this is not only because the United States (US) is increasingly reducing its commitment to Afghanistan as part of a broader '*America first*' approach to global affairs; raising questions over what and who will potentially fill this vacuum? Rather, insecurity in Afghanistan increasingly intersects

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European interests and challenges, such as migration, terrorism, and international crime, leading to elevated prioritisation in Brussels and capitals cities across the Union.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate EU policy in Afghanistan over the long *durée* and fill a significant gap within the current literature. To do this, this article combines a genealogy of Afghanistan's relationship with European institutions, starting in the mid-twentieth century, with an understanding of how Europe and Afghanistan sit within broader geopolitical tensions. Ultimately, this allows the paper to make two significant contributions. The first is the periodisation of the EU's approach to Afghanistan, and the second is deeper understanding of how and why contemporary EU policy has failed. To inform this analysis, the paper draws on a constructivist institutionalist methodology that is sensitive to policy change over time and the role crises play in punctuating political time (see Binder et al 2009; Hassan 2013). Methodologically, this looks for periods of settled policy-making and subsequent institutional changes caused by the periods of crisis and their narration (see Rosamond and Hay 2002). Utilising a wide range of official texts, archival resources and background interviews as the basis of data generation, an analysis was conducted to explicitly add value to the current literature and provide answers to why, *prima facie*, the European community appears to have failed within Afghanistan?² To address this question, a novel historical account is provided, which challenges the conventional description of the European community's relationship with Afghanistan. It rejects parsimonious accounts presented by scholars and policy commentators alike, which have asserted that EU institutions only became major stakeholders in Afghanistan from December 2001 (Theros 2010; Gross 2012; EU Council 2009). On the contrary, a more rigorous understanding of the European community's engagement shines new light on this increasingly significant relationship and suggests that any future vacuum, caused by US withdrawal, will be filled by European action just as it was in the 1990s.

Accordingly, the empirically rich account, which follows, reveals how the European Community's (EC) approach to Afghanistan has been wed to modernising and developing the state of Afghanistan since the 1950s. Initially focused on trade and aid from the 1950s-1980, this evolved into a humanitarian approach from the 1980s to 2001, and finally to democratisation and reconstruction from 2002 onward; with each stage punctuated by an international crisis leading to the subsequent policy change. The significance of each stage is unpacked in turn and provides the overarching structure of this article. In sum, the case study reveals that Europe's ability to influence events and have a tangible impact has largely ebbed and flowed depending on US strategic priorities and interventions. This is unfortunate, because not only do EU institutions have a positive story to tell about their historical involvement in Afghanistan, but there are broader lessons to be learnt from the EU's experiences. Adding to current literature, this article turns to, outlining the relationship between the European community and Afghanistan while evaluating the EU's performance against its stated objectives. It argues that ostensibly, EU level policies have moved in the right direction, making efforts to implement a comprehensive, inclusive, locally-driven, developmental approach which is culturally aware of the situation on the ground. However, there have been vital failings. Firstly, as EU level action transitioned from prioritising humanitarianism to democratisation and reconstruction, it accepted the assumptions embedded within the 'Bonn model'. Along with broader international efforts, EU policy proceeded on the basis that

² By way of method, over 6000 texts were methodically collected and entered into the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) NVivo, where texts were coded using a grounded theory approach, searching of repeated ideas, concepts, and discursive structures. For example, this included 4208 documents from EULex, in addition to archive material, and press releases from multiple EU institutions. Quantitative data was sourced from official data collections, but all newly presented calculations were produced by the author within the spreadsheet software Excel.

Afghanistan had entered a post-conflict stage, attempting to engage in democratisation and reconstruction efforts without the preamble of physical security. Secondly, within the context of the Bonn model, EU actorness was limited because of continued marginalisation by US and EU Member States interests. This limited the EU's ability to coordinate the efforts of individual Member States, and no discernible Europe wide approach to Afghanistan emerged. At the core of the EU's limitations, therefore, lies the tension favouring Atlantic solidarity over Europeanisation. What this article reveals is that EU actorness has been engaged but ineffective within international coalition efforts, but also at a local level in Afghanistan if measured against its internally agreed objectives.

The Rise of European Humanitarian Action in Afghanistan

Before elucidating Europe's contemporary policy towards Afghanistan, it is useful to take the reader for a few paragraphs through the constraining framework of history. Namely to establish the long-durée and undercurrents of European level engagement, but also to demonstrate that contemporary European policy in Afghanistan was not hastily derived following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Instead, it is an evolutionary product of historical contingent constraints and opportunities, which have established a path-dependent trajectory for over sixty years. Indeed, European level engagement with Afghanistan was initiated by the European Community (EC) starting with small levels of trade, dating back to the early 1950s. This relationship expanded throughout the 1960s-70s with the introduction of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the rise of European food aid (ECSC 1954; Bergmann 1977). For example, in 1971 the EC declared by way of community action that it 'proposed to grant to the Kingdom of Afghanistan 10,000 metric tons of common wheat under its 1970/71 food aid programme'. This was followed in 1972 with agreed conditions on the supply of common wheat as food aid (OJ 1972: 8; OJ 1973: 37–39). By 1975 EC food aid to Afghanistan was expanded from common wheat to include 300 metric tons of skimmed milk powder, and 600 metric tons of butteroil (OJ 1975a: 26–30; OJ 1975b: 33–37). Over nearly three decades EC institutions built the foundations of an evolving trade and aid relationship with a relatively stable Afghanistan. For the EC the institutionalisation of this relationship was a by-product of the CAP, and not one built around security concerns. The relationship provided an avenue to alleviate distortions of its own internal agricultural market, whilst supporting the perceived need for a growing 'actorness' in global affairs. Yet, for Afghanistan trade and aid were accepted as part of a wider attempt by Prime Minister, and later President, Mohammed Daoud to modernise and foster a developmental state (Suhrke 2007, 2; 7).

Importantly, for our purposes here, it was in this period that convergence was achieved within the EC, which reified into an approach stressing the need to assist Afghanistan in meeting its modernisation and development needs. This has formed the genealogical basis of agreement around which European powers have coalesced for decades and a historical thread through which the remainder of the article should be read. As we will see, while modalities of engagement and levels of commitment have fluctuated, this core assumption has not been reassessed but instead allowed to evolve. Indeed, the initial modality of European engagement, utilising trade and aid, was not disrupted until the Soviet invasion in 1979, when this international crisis precipitated a subtle reframing of relationships. *Ipso facto*, within this milieu, European relationships with Afghanistan proceeded through the prism of more geopolitical and security concerns. Notably, with the Member States of the Community and the EC Commission beginning to view Afghanistan through the lens of the Cold War and 'solidarity' with the US (Jenkins 1980).

The importance of this crisis was that, firstly, it exposed the rift between Atlantic solidarity and European integration; which, as we will see, is a theme that continues to contort European external

action towards Afghanistan. It did so by exposing significant problems with the EC's crisis management capacity. The EC could not act with national governments refusing to provide the necessary institutions with the authority or coherence for firm leadership or action. As Ham argues, 'Neither the EC nor the EPC [European Political Cooperation] were authorised more than in an informal way to deal with th[is] security issue' (2016, 115). For the "solidarity of the West", Member States forfeited the development of the EC's crisis management instruments, and the EC was unable to assert itself beyond an informal and limited capacity as a security actor in Afghanistan. Secondly, the crisis reinforced a prevalent debate regarding the inadequacies of the 'state-centric paradigm' of international affairs, and the viability of Civilian Power Europe (CPE), which had been unfolding in the 1970s and early 1980s (Bull 1982; Orbie 2006). Significantly, whereas the first dynamic limited European actorness, conclusions being drawn from the second established a pathway forward.³ Consequently, these limitations assertions around building a European identity would come to shape both EC external actorness more broadly, but importantly for our purposes, the evolution of European policy towards Afghanistan throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Herein, as much out of necessity as fitting with the zeitgeist, the EC convergence around modernisation and development evolved; coalescing around a humanitarian approach towards Afghanistan. A relationship built around the expediences of the CAP, mainly pushed by French interests, was increasingly understood through the limitations of European integration and pressures to provide a coherent European identity. By 1985, this was institutionalised in the *Aid to Uprooted People* (AUP) programme, along with the delivery of aid to Afghanistan from a representative office in Peshawar, Pakistan (ICG 2005, 3). Through the AUP programme, Europe was attempting to meet the needs of refugees and assist in their expected return in Afghanistan's Eastern providences (Sondorp 2004, 5). What emerged more broadly was that this humanitarian approach laid the foundations for the EU to emerge as a significant humanitarian coordinator in Afghanistan. Far from its often-caricatured tertiary role, the EC would become the single largest humanitarian donor to Afghanistan with over €500 million in aid allocated throughout the 1990s (European_Commission 2003, 15). This was a contribution of over 25 per cent of net official development assistance and official aid received by Afghanistan between 1990 to 1999.⁴ In the post-Cold War world, as the US pivoted away to enjoy its peace dividend, the EU increased its humanitarian role through the growing coordination of expanding NGO networks within the country.

Following the 1989 Soviet troop withdrawal, Member States were eager to permit the EU's humanitarian role in Afghanistan to expand (Katzman 2005, 3). As a security vacuum was left in the country, violent forces began exercising little restraint in committing widespread human rights violations and ignoring the rule of law. Exacerbated by drought, the level of human suffering led to millions of Afghans becoming either internally displaced or predominantly fleeing to Pakistan and Iran (Ruiz and Emery 2001; Rashid 2000, 21). In response to the growing insecurity, EU institutions on the ground emerged as the most strategically situated actors prepared to undertake

³ While there has been considerable debate about the term *actorness*, this term is used throughout this case study as a heuristic tool to study the most pertinent elements of the EU's capacity to act externally. It aims to capture, as Gunnar Sjöstedt argued, 'the capacity to behave actively and deliberately in relation to other actors in the international system' (1977, 16).

⁴ Figure calculated using adjusted Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development data, available from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ALLD.CD?end=1999&locations=AF&start=1990>

the role of humanitarian coordinator within the region, even as it maintained an emphasis on multilateral crisis management (Agence_Europe 1994). Herein, the EU buttressed the United Nations; supporting UN initiated activities and the coordination of humanitarian assistance. Notably, however, the EU was willing to bypass the UN in instances where European NGOs directly appealed for EU funds (Donini 1996, 51; also see ICG 2005). As the EU became the largest single aid donor, the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) became instrumental in providing food, water, health care and shelter to the local population throughout reachable parts of Afghanistan (European_Commission 2010). The EU's office in Peshawar also began to take on a discreet role in 'coordinating the work of NGOs, particularly in the health sector, which was supported by UNICEF, WHO, and the governmental authorities', allowing the EU to become the 'de facto coordinating body' in a range of sectors, and particularly in the realm of humanitarian assistance (Donini 1996, 38–51; Burns 1995). This was an important humanitarian role that is not recognised within the contemporary debate around Afghanistan. Its importance is that before September 11 2001, Member States had coalesced around, allowing the EU to build humanitarian capacity and pursue agreed policy as a major stakeholder that had humanitarian capacity on the ground. This humanitarian capacity was institutionalised through the EU's NGO networks and formal humanitarian assistance programmes. This was a humanitarian role *par excellence*, demonstrating the EU's capacity for external actorness within multilateral agreements and networks. As a significant external evaluation of the AUP programme identified,

"Aid for uprooted people" had ... a significant impact on the livelihood of uprooted people and host communities in Afghanistan. Its versatility allowed it to work with different actors (UNHCR, local government, International and Afghan NGOs), in a variety of sectors (health, agriculture, education, mine action) and through different mechanisms (direct delivery, capacity building and delegation of responsibility to local NGOs) (COTA 2000, 17).

It was because the EU had developed humanitarian instruments and relationships in the 1990s that tensions emerged between EU external action and the Taliban. With the 1994 release of the EU's first regional strategic document *Towards a New Asia Strategy*, the Union wanted to become more involved in the region playing a more significant role in 'the management of international affairs... [and] a constructive and stabilising role in the world' through 'positive contribution to regional security dialogues' (Commission of the European Communities 1994). A role that would come to fruition after 2001. Nevertheless, in the mid-1990s this sat well with the Commission's Directorate "Asia" unit becoming the informal coordinating body for aid, even as the Taliban surfaced and finally seized Kabul on September 27, 1996 (Rashid 2000, 22). This was a direct challenge to the EU's humanitarian engagement and NGO networks within the country. The EU Member States, in line with most of the international community, declined to extend diplomatic recognition to the Taliban, concerned as they were by a discriminatory regime attacking humanitarian workers and women's rights (European_Parliament 1996; ICG 2005). Tensions soon mounted, as the Taliban demanded that NGOs leave Kabul on June 1998, which led ECHO to suspend aid. This damaged the primary mechanism through which the EU operationalised its humanitarian agenda; by 1998, all EC funds were distributed through NGOs (ICG 2005, 10). So although ECHO resumed work in December 1998, it limited its activities to 'regions in the greatest need', such as Hazarajat 'which faced a Taliban blockade' (European Community Humanitarian Office 1998, 15).

The importance of the EU's external action in Afghanistan in the 1990s should be recognised as a significant contribution to humanitarian assistance, rather than overlooked within historical accounts. However, its importance goes beyond mere historical record. This genealogical context provides the constraining framework of history and ideas that have shaped the evolutionary

trajectory of current European policies. Most significantly, it demonstrates the basis of recurrent frames that predate US military action in 2001; namely European agreement over engaging Afghanistan and assisting with modernisation and development, European agreement over being a stabilising force in Asia, and frameworks for operationalising a humanitarian approach within a challenging environment. It also reveals challenges that pre-date its post-2001 involvement, namely the lack of crisis management tools, tensions between Atlantic solidarity and European integration, but also local challenges of practical humanitarian assistance within conflict zones.

Nevertheless, despite these historical sinews and evident tensions, the EU has a positive story to tell about its role. The Commission illustrates that its humanitarian approach had 'a tangible impact', supporting 'over 400 schools and over 200 basic health clinics, many offering services to women and girls' (European_Commission 2003). The Commission concedes, however, that its most significant impact was 'more on reducing extremes of vulnerability rather than actual development' due to the Taliban's policies 'in relation to girls' education and women's mobility and employment' (European_Commission 2003). The normative basis of EU actorness was ostensibly moving its external relationship forward, under challenging conditions, using civilian power that made a tangible difference. In place of greater external policy integration, operational capacity and resources, EU institutions had built a humanitarian network on the ground along with the expertise that this encompassed. This was an asset that afforded it human intelligence and contextual expertise. It was not until after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, that the EU's humanitarian capacity was significantly weakened. The G.W. Bush administration's decision to cast its response as a 'war on terror', led to the US reengagement with Afghanistan through traditional security instruments. The operational consequence of this, to which we now turn, was to marginalise European level action as by tensions between European integration and Atlantic solidarity resurfaced in a moment of crisis.

Crisis in 2001: Marginalising European Actorness in Afghanistan

As shock reverberated throughout European governments, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were represented as a crisis not only for the United States but also for the EU itself (Hassan 2010; European_Council 2001). Catalysed by the crisis, the Commission framed the need for more internal and external action and renewed calls for more traditional security instruments (European_Commission 2001a). This was an attempted departure from the humanitarian approach that had evolved throughout the 1980s-1990s, towards a more traditional security role and the establishment of military instruments. As Javier Solana argued in calls for building an EU Rapid Reaction Force,

We [the EU] don't want to be a superpower, but we have to get used to playing a greater international role, having a military arm to help with crisis management - and peacekeeping is an important part of that, it's inevitable (in Morris 2001).

This drive towards militarisation, while attempting to buttress civilian power, stumbled in the first instance because of the tensions between European integration and Atlantic solidarity. To justify a more concerted European response to the crisis, EU Member States began declaring their "solidarity" with the US and reifying sentiments of a "Western" security community (The Guardian 2001). This echoed similar calls in the early 1980s after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which similarly failed to result in deeper European integration of crisis management tools.

For the US, calls of "solidarity" were acknowledged and encouraged. Nevertheless, the G.W. Bush administration's desire to form 'coalitions of the willing' and proceed on an 'ad hoc' basis, as it

launched its campaign against the Taliban and al Qaeda, undermined the EU as a partner. Not only had NATO been rejected, and therefore the traditional institution for organising European cooperation and coordination in defence, but the manner in which ad hoc members joined the coalition was a direct challenge to the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Atlantic solidarity came at the expense of European integration and the development of EU level security instruments precisely because it aligned Member States with the US at the expense of collective EU action. Britain, France and Germany bolstered their solidarity with the US, at the cost of a Europeanised response. Thus, as Eva Gross, who served as a Political Advisor to EU Special Envoy to Afghanistan, noted about these Member States decisions,

This... provoked resentment not only for compromising EU unity but also for engaging in what may be termed mini-lateralism: discussing contributions in closed meetings, often ahead of EU summits – thereby sidelining smaller EU Member States (2009, 39).

By undermining European unity, the US marginalised the EU as a security actor while it launched its military campaign against Afghanistan. Invoking the notion of "solidarity", only to be rebuffed, fundamentally undermined the credibility of the EU as a distinct security actor and weakened the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). As the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for Afghanistan, between 2002-2008, Francesc Vendrell would later explain, the 'EU is rather pitiful' and 'we [the EU] look pretty pathetic at times' because the US 'ignored' EU concerns and left officials 'frustrated' (Vendrell 2008).

The US had pushed EU institutions and instruments aside because of its desire to utilise the powerful militaries of European Member States. In doing so, it removed the de facto humanitarian coordinator in Afghanistan with over a decade's worth of knowledge and experience. This was short-sighted. The EU delegation had 'established [a] reputation for the best political reporting in Afghanistan, employing experts with years of experience working in Afghanistan... [and the EU] had all the advantages' (Burke 2014, 4). Seeing the war in Afghanistan through a traditional security lens, and a military vacuum at the EU level, the US cast aside the expertise of personnel within the EU's established networks. The US did so at the expense of much-needed proficiency in humanitarian assistance. Namely, as such assistance can act as a prerequisite facilitator of other reconciliation, reconstruction and nation-building capacities. By marginalising the EU in favour of more powerful Member States, the US limited the available level of expertise needed to assist with the post-war conditions. At first, this was in favour of counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan, but this became more acute as the US turned its attention and resources to the conflict in Iraq. Indeed, as a US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) report would later outline as one of its top ten lessons, '[s]uccessfully conceiving and implementing a stabilization strategy requires extensive local knowledge of the host-nation government and population', but, 'Collecting information about Afghan communities—their rivalries, histories, and leaders—was extremely difficult, even in the best of circumstances' (SIGAR 2018b, xi). This failure on the part of the US is not something existing literature on either the US or EU relationships with Afghanistan considers. Yet, increasingly in international relations, network theory is demonstrating the importance of building and strengthening networks to bolster resilience and capacity. This is a particular strength of EU actorness because the EU is itself a collection of networks (Slaughter 2017, 18). With the benefits of hindsight, this should be a critical reflection. This is especially the case because as a consequence of marginalisation and US strategy, EU institutions were obliged to adapt their approach to Afghanistan from focusing on humanitarianism to emphasising a policy focused on reconstruction and democratisation.

The Rise of European Democratisation and Reconstruction in Afghanistan

Evolving out of the crisis, EU Member States coalesced around democratisation and reconstruction as their united response. Not only did this concur with broader international strategies, but it resonated with the long-term agreement to assist Afghanistan with its modernisation and development needs and desires to be a more stabilising force in Asia. It also recognised the limitations of EU instruments, assisted with European level identity construction, and outwardly masked tensions within the Union over solidarity with the US. These historical currents created a path-dependency, but crucially, this approach was made possible because of the seemingly swift collapse of the Taliban regime and the start of the Bonn Process at the end of 2001. In late November, Afghan political leaders met in Bonn starting a diplomatic process. In December this process culminated in the signing of an agreed transition of political power structures and the reestablishment of government institutions. The European General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) fully supported the process, appointing Ambassador Klaus-Peter Klaiber as the European Union's Special Representative for Afghanistan (General Affairs 2001, 13). At the top of the EU's agenda, however, were three main concerns. Firstly, the GAERC placed humanitarian aid as an 'absolute priority for the Union' (General Affairs 2001, 13–15). This was an enduring sinew of the EU's humanitarianism, but with 'reconstruction' added as a requirement. Indeed, as the GAERC emphasised, there was a need for a 'consistent and coordinated approach to humanitarian aid, immediate needs *and reconstruction*... by all possible means' (General Affairs 2001, 13–15). This was operationalised shortly after, with ECHO reopening its office in Kabul and re-evaluating its programmes, along with European support and assistance for the independent Afghan Support Group (ASG). The ASG brought together donors, UN agencies and NGOs, for the measurement and analysis of the assistance communities' objectives and the implementation of principles on the ground. EU institutions played to their strengths early within the process, but the GAERC was keen to expand the EU's overall obligations, operational capacity and the available resources. 'Reconstruction' was now part of the rubric of EU policy.

Secondly, the GAERC sought to prioritise the post-conflict security situation in the country. In particular, the EU remained concerned about the 'repeated attacks on representatives of humanitarian NGOs in Afghanistan' and the re-emergence of violent forces (General Affairs 2001, 13–15). Both the UN and the EU were pushing the importance of security across the country, but the US remained firmly committed to placing counter-terrorism at the core of US objectives (Orme 2002; SCFR 2001). Herein, tensions between Atlantic solidarity and European integration resurfaced. Member States rejected notions of a possible 'EU force' as a contributor to ISAF in favour of contributions to the US-led coalition. As Eva Gross points out, this demonstrated the 'divergent views on the part of EU Member States as to the EU CFSP/ESDP's global and military reach and ambitions' (2009, 39). This was despite twenty-one EU Member States providing the majority of the 5,000 ISAF troops stationed in Kabul, and European countries going on to provide the command for ISAF most of the time (Blockmans et al. 2014, 11). Once again, Atlantic solidarity, marginalised Europeanisation efforts, and the Member States systematically undermined attempts to build EU integrated crisis management tools.

The EU's third priority, seen to be facilitated by the previous two, lay in the immediate reconstruction of Afghanistan and its long-term social, political and economic transformation into a functioning democratic state. Within this policy sphere, Member States allowed EU policy to expand beyond the minimally coalesced principles of humanitarianism. The eventual democratisation of Afghanistan was seen to be in the interests of the Union's collective security goals along with the national interests of the Member States themselves (European_Union 2003, 4). Afghanistan needed to be brought into the international community through the fostering of

good governance, which would remove the precipitation of international threats. The reconstruction of the country had become a central security goal in its own right. This marked a significant evolutionary shift within the relationship, as humanitarianism was transformed into a longer-term democratisation project; with the GAERC asserting the need for the 'formation of a broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative government committed to a positive gender perspective and improving conditions for women' (General Affairs 2001). As the EU's reconstruction and humanitarian assistance objectives merged, normative values underpinned a clear preference to initiate long-term democratisation processes. The use of the European Rapid Reaction Mechanism (RRM) in Afghanistan, within days of the Bonn Process being undertaken, was targeted at legitimising a peaceful and democratic political transition. Similarly, in May 2002, the RRM programme was used to enhance the 'credibility of the Afghan Interim Administration among the Afghan population' (ICG 2005, 5).

To move this reconstruction programme forward, the EU became a founding member of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Steering Group (ARSG) (European_Commission 2001b). The ARSG was instrumental in early discussions of how to develop a coordinated approach to international contributions. As the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) began to release their preliminary needs assessments for Afghanistan's reconstruction; the EU was able to push forward the "base case" assumption that \$9-12 billion would be needed over the first five years. This became the preliminary position for the 2002 ARSG Ministerial Pledging Conference in Tokyo, where European representation pressed for reconstruction contributions beyond those already allocated for humanitarian assistance (European_Commission 2002). This significant role played to the strengths of the Commission, as a body used to reach common ground within a multilateral setting (Europa 2002). It also placed the EU and Member States as a central force pushing a reconstruction and democratisation agenda in Afghanistan.

Since 2002, therefore, there has been a set of consistent objectives focused on the long-term democratisation of Afghanistan,

To promote the Bonn Agreement and its implementation by all groups. To promote democracy and the protection of Human Rights. To establish an effective macroeconomic and monetary framework. To reinforce the fight against illegal drugs and terrorism. To promote cooperation with neighbouring countries. To enhance the role of women. To provide support for civil, social and military structures and services and aid for all those in need, especially refugees and displaced persons (European_Commission 2006, 4).

Repeatedly rearticulated by the Commission, these goals were given particular emphasis in the 2003-2006 and 2007-2013 *Country Strategy Papers* (CSP). However, these objectives were broad and often in conflict with those of the War on Terror at an operational level. Most consequently, however, as Waldman points out, 'The Bonn Agreement and subsequent international plans envisioned the swift establishment of a highly centralised, functional, democratic state, and set over-ambitious modernising goals' (2013, 826). The vision of the future set out in the Bonn agreement did not occur, but was the basis of upon which considerable international action was taken, and the agenda that Europe was pushing forward. Within this space, the EU and its Member States supported the US and World Bank designed 'Bonn model', whereby the political process was emphasised at the cost of humanitarianism, along with a post-war reconstruction of the Afghan State (Michelsen Institute 2005, 22).

The 'Bonn Model' provided a constraining framework for future action. Along with the wider international community, EU institutions shifted considerable focus from humanitarianism to reconstruction and democratisation. So, while ECHO still carried out humanitarian assistance, significant NGO mapping exercises have shown that this was in contrast to other donors political and security agendas. Even with ECHO's presence in Afghanistan, there lacked humanitarian focused critical mass after 2001. As one comprehensive report discusses at length,

From a humanitarian perspective, perhaps the single most serious error committed since 2001 is to be found in the way in which donors and the aid community defined the Afghan situation in the aftermath of 9/11. All players willingly accepted the notion that Afghanistan was in a post-conflict situation and that there was no longer a need for humanitarian action despite evidence to the contrary. The prevailing wisdom was that the principal role of external actors... was to support the government. As a result, the existing capacity for addressing humanitarian need that had been built up since the late 1980s and had successfully weathered the Taliban years (1996-2001), when it provided the only visible representation of the international community's engagement in Afghanistan, was dismantled under the fallacious assumption that it was no longer needed (Donini 2009, 9).

As Antonio Donini, the former Director of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (1999-2002), clearly identifies, there was a significant shift in policy across the international community's approach to Afghanistan; a shift in which the EU was a primary player in promoting. Extrapolating from this point, the importance of EU policy moving the focus from humanitarianism to post-conflict reconstruction and democratisation is clear. The GAERC's support for assumptions embedded in the Bonn Process and the continuing reconstruction objectives were problematic. Accepting that Afghanistan had entered a post-conflict phase was a misdiagnosis of the situation and the challenges ahead, borne out by the growing insecurity over the next two decades. One that meant the EU's objectives, along with others in the international coalition, were set without correctly diagnosing the challenges of the strategically selective context ahead. European actors were significant in pushing this agenda forward, through, for example, the influence it yielded at the ARSG, but also by expanding into the realm of democratisation (Blockmans et al. 2014). Marginalised as a security actor, EU level efforts sort to institutionalise complimentary support within multilateral frameworks, rather than be internationally leading efforts in their own right. This has meant maintaining substantial levels of aid and being a principal donor, despite EU responsibilities in the country not matching the financial contributions made (Europa 2017). This approach, and the weight of the EU's contribution to it, is highly evident, if for example we consider international reconstruction funding for Afghanistan through the *Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund* (ARTF) and the *Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan* (LOTFA), which are the international community's two central multilateral reconstruction trust funds. By early 2019, the EU alone had been the fourth highest contributor to the ARTF and the LOTFA combined, behind the US, UK and Japan (see Table One).

Table One: 2019 Cumulative contributions to ARTF and LOTFA by the ten largest donors (\$ Millions).⁵

	ARTF	LOTFA	Total
United States	3528	1669	5197
United Kingdom	1923	307	2230
Japan	481	1598	2079
European Union	1014	588	1602
Germany	907	522	1429
Canada	805	132	937
Netherlands	560	144	704
Norway	544	77	621
Australia	424	54	478
Italy	165	221	386
All others	1082	225	1307
Total	11433	5537	16970

Yet, the EU and Member States total combined contribution, considerably outpaced the US as the single largest donor within these multilateral instruments, with the combined total of ARTF and LOTFA since 2002 totalling thirty-seven per cent (see Table Two). Importantly, these aid contributions have not afforded higher levels of EU actorness inside Afghanistan. The US, within the same timeframe, provided approximately \$9.5 billion in bilateral aid to the Afghan government. Nevertheless, although the US has remained the primary actor in Afghanistan, it is clear from the proportional weight of multilateral contributions and the promotion of reconstruction and democratisation efforts it has not been solely a US effort. European involvement has been significant and therefore is capable of claiming relative ownership of policy successes and failures.

Table Two: 2019 US and combined EU Member States cumulative contributions to ARTF and LOTFA (\$ Millions).⁶

	ARTF	LOTFA	Total
Combined Net Total Funds to 2019	11433	5537	16970
United States contribution to Net Total Funds	3528	1669	5197
US Total Funds Percentage	30.86%	30.14%	30.62%
EU Member States contribution to Net Total Funds	4569	1782	4569
EU Member States Total Funds Percentage	39.96%	32.18%	37.42%

⁵ Data adapted from SIGAR 43rd Report to the US Congress (2019, 68).

⁶ Data adapted from SIGAR 43rd Report to the US Congress (2019, 68).

The Culpable Failure of the European Union's Policy

Despite the EU's seemingly sensible approach to Afghanistan, it has been unable to dispel the notion that it is ineffectual given the weight of its contribution. As Francesc Vendrell has argued, the EU only in 'small ways had some impact' and despite substantial financial contributions 'we have all failed' allowing Afghanistan to turn into a 'criminal narco-state' (Vendrell 2008). Indeed, taking the EU's stated macro-objectives as the basis for evaluating its policy, it is clear that EU actorness and the Bonn model has failed. On humanitarianism, the UNDP's 2017 Human Development Index (HDI), by way of example, ranked Afghanistan 168/189 countries despite the considerable development assistance the country has received since 2001; Afghanistan remains one of the only thirty-eight countries in the world classified as having low human development.⁷ After Yemen, it has the lowest HDI value in Asia and performs considerably below neighbouring countries such as Pakistan (See Chart One). This trend is supported by multiple key studies, which have found that aid delivery in 2018 continued to be ineffective (ATR 2018; SIGAR 2018a).

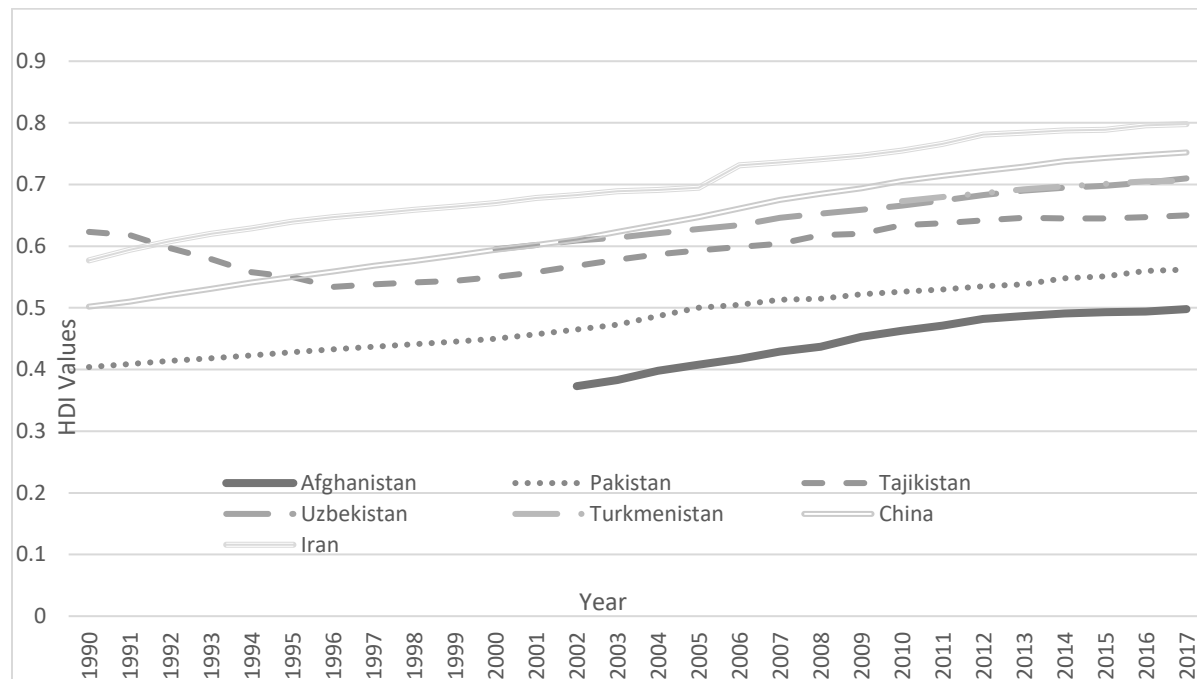
On security, unable to go beyond the limits of civilian power, EU level action contributed little to its objective of improving post-conflict security, and Member States have struggled to be effective. By way of an indicator, the UN recognised civilian deaths and injuries more than doubled from 2009 to 2018 (UNAMA 2019). Accordingly, the *2019 Global Peace Index* (GPI) ranked Afghanistan as the least peaceful country in the world at 163/163, and the *2018 Global Terrorism Index* ranked it the second most deadly country for terrorist violence.⁸ Lack of progress has hampered international efforts to promote democratisation, with Afghanistan being ranked as 'authoritarian' by the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) *2018 Democracy Index*, and 'not free' by Freedom House's *2019 Freedom in the World Report*.⁹ The EIU data demonstrates that Afghanistan scored lower on the *Democracy Index* in 2018 than in 2006. Within this broad context, EU objectives have not been met. EU actorness has been ineffective at either directly or indirectly affecting significant systemic change in Afghanistan, along with the US and the broader international coalition.

⁷ The UNDP HDI data here was the latest available at the time of analysis available from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/AFG>

⁸ Data available from <http://visionofhumanity.org/indexes/global-peace-index/> and <http://visionofhumanity.org/indexes/terrorism-index/>

⁹ Data available from <https://infographics.economist.com/2018/DemocracyIndex/> and <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/afghanistan>

Chart One: 1990-2017 Human Development Index Values for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries



More directly, at an EU Programme level, achieving EU objectives have been subtly more positive. However, institutionalising EU programmes has not been without significant challenges. As the most comprehensive independent evaluation of the EU's cooperation with Afghanistan explains, 'EU funded programmes have led to tangible outcomes and impacts' and '[d]irect negative effects have largely been avoided' (LA et al. 2019). Appreciably, this marks a continuation of evaluations and the demonstrable successes of the 1990s outlined above. However, while there have been 'commendable results' in the areas of 'Agriculture & Rural Development and Health sectors' these are 'less so in the Democratisation & Accountability and Policing & Rule of Law sectors' (LA et al. 2019). EU programmes have primarily succeeded in the areas where capacity was established in the 1990s, but not in those expanded to meet the objectives of the Bonn model. Indeed, EU programmes have revealed themselves to be intermittently slow, unsustainable, ridged in design, and because of the 'overall high level of international development assistance (including EU contributions) together with weak accountability mechanisms... created opportunities for corruption' (LA et al. 2019). Notably, such programmes can themselves contribute to instability, because as the 2018 US stabilisation assessment illustrates 'large sums of stabilization dollars... exacerbated conflicts enabled corruption, and bolstered support for insurgents' demonstrating that '[i]ncreased funding alone cannot compensate for stabilization's inherent challenges, and believing that it will can exacerbate those challenges' (SIGAR 2018b). While there is no space here for a comprehensive systems flow analysis of EU funds, it is clear that successes need to be balanced with considerations of exacerbating further problems. Nevertheless, what this shows is that the EU has failed to meet its macro and programme level objectives despite consistently reiterating their importance for decades. EU actorness in Afghanistan has failed to be effective on multiple levels despite its prioritisation.

Primarily, as the key international actor in the conflict, the US bears the majority of responsibility for the overwhelming failures in Afghanistan. The consequences of the US turning its attention to Iraq, the use of budgets to drive policy, and the reliance on Hamid Karzai rather than confronting

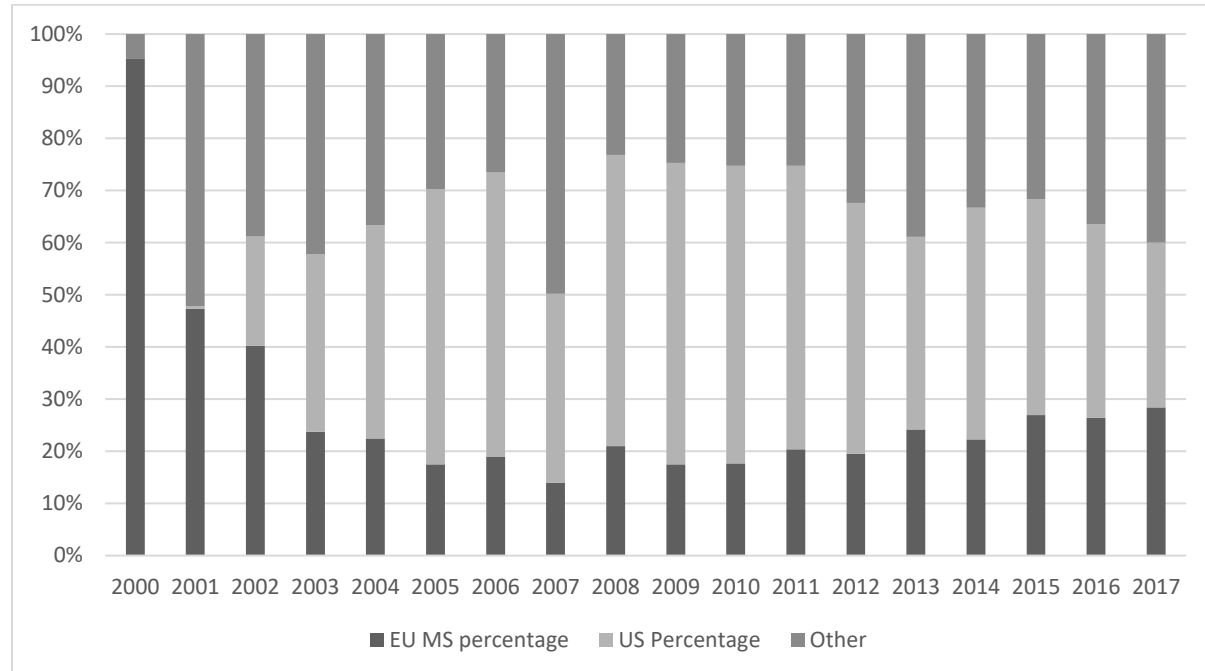
his government's corrupt links to the drug trade and warlords have been well documented (Chayes 2007; Gall 2012; Swenson 2017; Waldman 2013). These factors are significant because they provide a broader explanation for why the US failed in Afghanistan, and are the predominant reasons for the conflict continuing towards a second decade. However, the EU does not escape culpability, as one of several actors that have contributed to a failing strategy. So, while there is not a one-to-one relationship between the totality of the outcome in Afghanistan and the EU's efforts, the US strategy has received considerable support from EU institutions and the EU Member States that is worth reflecting upon. Assistance commitments to Afghanistan from OECD/DAC donors amounted to approximately \$58 billion between 2002 and 2017.¹⁰[\[10\]](#) While the US contributed 47 per cent of this sum, the EU and its Member States have provided 24 per cent of overall total support (see Chart Two). Europe is therefore not tangential but has instead been a significant overall contributor to a failed strategy international strategy. Indeed, as Burke argues, from the US perspective, 'If the war was going badly it was because Europe was not paying enough attention... this was the war Europe was supposed to manage while the US focused on Iraq' (2014, 4–5). A clear example of a capability-expectations gap in significant part caused by Atlantic solidarity generating a disjointed European approach. Rather than being an issue of 'attention', it was the EU's marginalisation by the US and the Member States that has conditioned the trajectory of EU level policy failure after the Bonn Process.

Whilst the EU Member States have contributed a significant level of aid, and coalesced around common objectives, it was identified as early as 2005 that they had 'not acted as a group', undermining a "European model" for assistance to Afghanistan' (Michelsen Institute 2005; also see European Parliament 2010, 10). Without a centralised Europeanised response, Member States diverged in their efforts. As such, France and the UK supported US efforts to train the new Afghan National Army (ANA). With regards to other high-profile reconstruction efforts, Germany led on police reform, the UK on drug control, and Italy on judicial reform (Blockmans et al. 2014, 11). As a consequence, Member States often failed to support EU level efforts, and the UK and Germany did not want to diverge from US policy visibly. The consequences of this proved to be dire. Responsibility for the 2002 German-led police training mission was transferred to the EU in 2007, leading to the institutionalisation of EUPOL. This was a result of the US and NATO being frustrated by 'very disappointing' German efforts (Tygesen 2013).

Similarly, Italy's efforts as "lead nation" on the rule-of-law were fundamentally flawed, as Italy 'lacked the expertise, resources, interest, and influence needed to succeed in such an undertaking' (Dobbins et al. 2007, 101). As a result, the US sidestepped Italy, implementing its own rule of law initiatives (Swenson 2017, 122). Further still, the UK's failed counter-narcotics approach, compensating farmers for destroying their opium crops, had not lasted twelve-months before Prime Minister Blair petitioned the US for support (Berry 2018, 725). Even with Anglo-American cooperation, the UK's ambitious target of eradicating opium in ten-years proved widely off target. Far from reaching this target, 2017 saw opium cultivation in Afghanistan reach a record high with an estimated 328,000 hectares, up 63 per cent compared with 201,000 hectares in 2016 (UNODC 2018, 13). That is approximately equivalent to the landmass of London doubling in size in a single year. Far from the Member States adopting successful strategies, they either Europeanized their failures or became marginalised themselves by the US due policy failures; demonstrating attempts at "mini-lateralism" to be significantly unsuccessful for both the US and European powers.

¹⁰ Figure adjusted to constant US dollars at 2016 levels by OECD DAC

Chart Two: Annual Percentage of OECD DAC contributions to Afghanistan between 2000-2017



In addition, the EUSR role in Afghanistan, while at times being central, had limited impact because it was unable to Europeanise a coordinated approach. EUSR Vendrell was able to get the EU Member States to adopt an *EU-Afghanistan Joint Declaration* on November 16, 2005, and also gained access to the elite Policy Action Group chaired by Hamid Karzai (Quigley 2007, 202–3). This allowed the EU to maintain a ‘face’ and ‘voice’ in Afghanistan, while also allowing the EU actorness to move more ‘quickly and decisively’ than going through the EU Presidency (ICG 2005, 6–7). Similarly, EUSR Klaiber was able to assist the UN mission and speak on behalf of the EU, notably on issues such as the need to expand the ISAF mission beyond Kabul in June 2002, and lobby EU Member States for a more active political role, rather than merely making financial contributions (Gross 2009, 43–44). The EUSR mechanism, however, remained hollow and confused. Due to the limits of EU power and instrumental reach, the EUSR brought few new issues to the table, and has been criticised for adding ‘little substance’. Where it was useful, is that it helped fulfil its intended purpose of addressing ‘Afghan fears that [the EU] will abandon them’ (ICG 2005, 7).

Moving Beyond the Bonn Model and US Commitments

Demonstrably, Europe has been engaged and committed in Afghanistan, but it has not resolved the historical tensions between Atlanticism and integration, and in turn, transformed its institutionalisation into effectiveness. While it has maintained a focus on modernisation and development for a significant period, the adoption and promotion of the Bonn model were problematic. It created a path-dependency towards significant policy failures. At times, the EU policy-innovators have attempted to move beyond this model. A casing point emerged in December 2007, when the EU's second most senior official, Michael Semple, was expelled from Afghanistan for communicating with the Taliban and ‘threatening [Afghan] national security’ (Boone 2007). The EU was punished for outlining an approach that over a decade later is

considered to be the international consensus. As US Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo declared when inviting the Taliban to enter peace talks in July 2018, the Taliban 'cannot wait us out' but 'we can't settle this from the outside' (Pompeo 2018). Semple had this realisation well ahead of the contemporary consensus, and indeed it was around this period that some researchers have suggested that 'several Taliban commanders h[ad] pronounced themselves willing to see the EU play a role as an intermediary' in the conflict (Korski 2009, 7; Theros 2010, 155–57). Given the tensions this would have posed to the democratisation agenda, it is difficult to imagine the EU Member States navigating the potential pitfalls of this position. However, typically, Member States have coalesced around the euphemism of an 'Afghan-led' process. As the EU Council agreed in 2018,

The EU supports an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, with the Government and the Taliban at its core, as the only viable path towards a sustainable resolution of the armed conflict (European_Council 2018).

That European policy, along with the international coalition, has evolved along this path is significant. It exposes the rationale underpinning the democratisation approach, but also the tensions preventing its realisation. EU Member states moved from condemning the Taliban throughout the 1990s, determining their culpability for international terrorism in the 2000s, only to invite them into a peace process and therefore a potential governmental role in the late 2010s. Referring to an 'Afghan-led process' obfuscates this tension, but chimes with the international realisation that a lack of physical security in Afghanistan has prevented democratisation and reconstruction from taking hold. Afghanistan never entered a post-conflict situation where physical security was able to provide the necessary conditions for reconstruction and democratisation. It also recognises the reality of growing tensions between Europe and the US, and the Trump administration's attempt to withdraw its commitment to Afghanistan. Yet, this scenario itself poses serious challenges for Europe. The historical account outlined above demonstrates that if any withdrawal was to create a vacuum, then European commitments are likely to be central in attempting to elevating a humanitarian crisis. This is particularly the case given that failures in Afghanistan impact the EU directly. This has undoubtedly been the case since the levels of violence increased following the security vacuum left by the drawdown of NATO combat operations in 2014. Where, by September 2017, Afghan's had become the largest group of asylum applicants in the EU, fleeing an increasingly violent conflict (Pitonak and Beşer 2017, 4). Significantly, however, the EU continues to lack the necessary crisis management tools; just as the EC did in 1979 and 2001. Capacities have not been built, and lessons have not been learned despite a repetitive pattern of crises in Afghanistan.

By way of creating a Europeanized approach, the EU and Afghanistan signed a non-binding agreement entitled a *Joint Way Forward on Migration Issues* while placing Afghanistan within the context of the 2016 EU *Global Strategy* (EUGS) (European_Parliament 2018, 3). The later acknowledging the growing need for crisis management tools along with the integration opportunities presented by the British vote to exit the EU (BREXIT). Indeed, the EUGS was designed to make decisive steps on Security and Defence and develop a 'new level of ambition and key steps to upgrade cooperation to ensure the Security of [the] Union' (Europa 2018a). Based on the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy's (HRVP), Federica Mogherini's, *Implementation Plan on Security and Defence* its aims are to develop crisis management tools and 'help governments jointly build military capacity' (Europa 2018a). With all its discussion of security and defence, along with the need for an integrated approach to conflicts, its impact on the EU's approach to Afghanistan has been limited. This is despite the collective

agreement that 'a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan is a cornerstone for the stability and development of the entire region' (European_Council 2018).

Moving beyond the acceptance of the Bonn model, through peace talks and withdrawal of US commitments in Afghanistan, the EUGS may well exacerbate the *capability-expectations gap* in the first instance. Reflective of this point was the culmination of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) in June 2017 to allow the EU to react faster, efficiently and effectively 'as a security provider outside its borders' (Europa 2018b). Under the EU Military Staff, part of the European External Action Service, the MPCC has become active as part of the EU's new crisis management capacity furthering plans to run autonomous EU military operations by the end of 2020 (Howorth 2018). However, this new capacity has been circumscribed in Afghanistan. That the MPCC was developed within the broader framework of strengthening civil/military cooperation, and avoiding duplication with NATO, talks directly to the continued tensions between Europeanising defence and security practices and the desire for Atlantic solidarity. Accordingly, the EUGS has merely reinstated a commitment to 'support state-building and reconciliation processes in Afghanistan together with our regional and international partners' (European_Union 2016). In practical terms, this means that despite the EUGS, BREXIT, and visible tensions with the Trump administration, the EU will continue to lack the fungibility to transform and utilise the capabilities of Member States in Afghanistan. While the EU and Member States remain, significant international aid contributors, the EUGS has done little in the short term for crisis management in Afghanistan and is ill-prepared for the potential drawdown of American commitments.

Conclusion

Measured against its objectives, the EU's multilateral strategy in Afghanistan has failed to move Afghanistan towards a secure democratic state. The EU is not the primary cause of this, but it is appreciably responsible for promoting a strategy that misdiagnosed the situation in Afghanistan. It is therefore proportionally culpable for both successes and failures that such a strategy produced. Indeed, while it has had a long-term commitment to engaging with Afghanistan, this was misdirected under the erroneous assumption in 2002 that a context for reconstruction and democratisation had been cultivated with the removal of the Taliban. Yet, as this genealogical account of policy development has shown, Europe's experience in Afghanistan provides essential lessons. Firstly, Europe is and has been, a significant humanitarian actor that has been able to mitigate the worst of human suffering through the mid-1980s into the twenty-first century. Secondly, that it has built humanitarian networks and experience that still pay dividends through programme level action. Thirdly, allowing a humanitarian approach to be articulated with reconstruction and democratisation from 2002 onwards, did not adequately recognise the impact that historical tensions over Atlantic solidarity and European integration would play in undermining these objectives, and the lack of European and international, capacity to see them through. Fourth, historically neglected crisis management capacity means that a Europeanised response to any future crises in Afghanistan is likely to falter. Fifth, historically as the US withdraws its involvement in Afghanistan, the need for European action increases, not only because of an identity based around CPE, but because of more extensive interests produced by Afghanistan's proximity to the Union. These are the essential lesson within current international affairs. Namely, the international community's relationship with Afghanistan may well prove to be cyclical. If the US was to withdraw from Afghanistan, drawing down the 15,000 U.S. troops deployed at the end of 2018, then the EU needs to be more prepared for crisis management than it was in the 1990s and 2001. This potential withdrawal would open new challenges and leadership opportunities for the EU, which would need to be met with more productive efforts. The EU remains committed to promoting peace, security and regional stability, along with reinforcing democracy, spurring

economic and human development, and furthering the rule of law and respect for human rights. As this article demonstrates, this may be aspirational given the level of institutional resources needed.

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